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## Construction on Michigan superlock to begin in 2003

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**Local News** - The Michigan Transportation Commission approved funding of the largest marine project on the Great Lakes in more than three decades — a new superlock in the Michigan Sault.

The commission placed \$4.7 million in a dedicated reserve fund, to be withdrawn in annual payments of \$280,000 over the next 50 years, to cover the state's share (\$14.1 million) of the \$225-million project.

Washington will cover the majority of construction costs in creating a second superlock on the St. Mary's River while each of eight Great Lakes states will split the balance.

Construction is scheduled to begin late next year on a new lock that will accommodate 1,000-foot vessels and replace the more than 85-year-old Davis and Sabin Locks.

Only two of four locks in the Michigan Sault are operational and only one, the Poe Lock, dedicated in 1969, after six years of construction, can handle 1,000-foot freighters.

The Poe Lock is the workhorse of the operational facilities, typically handling about three quarters of 4,000 commercial vessels annually, while the MacArthur Lock, constructed after the Second World War, is capable of handling smaller cargo ships and recreational traffic.

The Sabin and Davis Locks were constructed during the First World War.

The Sabin stopped being operational in the mid 1990s and the Davis is still available on an emergency basis for narrow, shallow-draft vessels.

U.S. Congress ratified the new lock, which can accommodate vessels up to 1,013 feet in length and 105 feet in width, in 1986.

The superlock project will include construction of coffer dams, approach work on piers, dredging, demolition of the old locks and construction of the new lock.

An estimated 4,000 commercial vessels, laden with 86 million tons of cargo, primarily iron ore, coal and grain, as well as 7,000 small boats pass through the lock system annually.

The locks allow for passage of deep-draft ships around the St. Mary's Rapids — there being a 21-foot difference in elevations between Lakes Superior-Huron.

The Poe Lock, the only lock ever constructed between two operational locks, was the previous largest marine project on the Great Lakes, the commission says.

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